LATIN AMERICAN MASS COMMUNICATION: AN UNFAIR SYSTEM FOR AN UNFAIR SOCIETY

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** Opinions expressed in this paper are solely personal of the author and not of the institution for which he works.

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INTRODUCTION

The Federal Republic of Germany has, for many years now, provided technical and financial assistance to Third World countries to improve and expand their mass communication media. The Ebert Foundation is quite active in this respect in Latin America, doing valuable work mostly from service points in Jamaica and Ecuador. The Adenauer Foundation, operating from basis in Peru and Brazil, provides substantial assistance to training in instructional and cultural television. Several German Catholic organizations support a mass education movement through "radiophonic schools" in Latin America. And more recently some German institutions have made appreciable contributions to the dialogue about the Third World aspirations to establish a "New International Information Order." For instance, the German Foundation for International Development sponsored in 1978 in Bonn an international conference on the NIIO goals and prospects.* Furthermore, some West German analysts are assessing their own country's behavior about foreign information, specially on the Third World countries. For instance, Renate von Gizicky (1975) has criticized German foreign reporting as stubbornly colonial and prejudiced, calling attention to concerns expressed about deficiencies in this area through a survey of 800 leading personalities in the Federal Republic.

A German broadcaster with experience in international communication, Richard Dill (1978, p. 8) believes it consensual "... that the Federal Republic of Germany advocates an international system which allows the largest possible number of people to obtain from a maximum number of mutually independent sources at reasonable cost as large an amount of information as may facilitate the taking of responsible decisions affecting one's own life and help to improve the quality of life."

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* See the preliminary report of it drafted by Dieter Bielenstein (1979). The February 1979 issue of Germany's Medium is addressed to the debate on the New International Information Order. Patricia Di Rubbo (1979) is one of the authors writing perceptively about the Latin American case in said magazine. Dr. Gerhard Maletzke, who has been the teacher of many Latin American journalists through CIESPAL in Quito, has proposed a number of valuable ideas for German cooperation in the development of print media in the Third World (Maletzke, 1978). A thorough overview of the process by which the construction of the NIIO is being attempted has been contributed by Berwanger (1978).

A German development communication specialist with an outstanding international experience, Reinhard Keune (1978, p. 4) stresses the following:

> The Bonn representative at the 1976 Nairobi UNESCO General Conference, State Secretary Hermes, stated our government's unconditional willingness for dialogue and cooperation. The German side must therefore ask itself and its Third World partners how this declaration of intent it is to be fleshed out with content - especially in the important area of regional and international information flow.

Celebrating such concepts and intentions, this paper aims at providing West German readers with basic information about the realities of mass communication in Latin America. Most of its text is devoted to a description of the characteristic features of the media system, giving special attention to radio and television. Then emphasis is placed on a main determinant of the nature of said system: the influence of the United States of America. A brief word of hope is presented in closing a summary diagnosis of a situation which is not encouraging.

THE STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

> "The evident injustice which characterises the present international structure of communications has forced the need for a new international information order as integral and complementary to the NIEO. One cannot hope to modify the economic order without modifying the information order" (ILET, 1979, p. 1)

Are mass media broadly available in Latin America? How does the region's communication endowment compare with those of developed regions and, on the other hand, with those of other developing regions? What is known about the behavior of the media in relation to the region's struggle to overcome underdevelopment? What are the ownership patterns? What role does advertising play? What, in essence, is the structure of mass communication in Latin America?

Mass Media Availability

Summarizing world-wide data on mass media availability as of 1961 (Unesco, 1961), Wilbur Schramm (1970, p. 153) concluded that "... the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America are have-not people in mass communication. Latin America does well in newspaper and radio, it is true, but is still below well-developed regions, and it lags, despite its widely used common languages, in forming news agencies." Comparing regions of the less developed parts of the world and noting differences between the media, Schramm (1970, p. 153) afirmed: "In every respect, except film making, Latin America is somewhat further developed in communication than either Asia and Africa. This is most notably true of radio and television..."

Data available a decade later confirmed the tendencies underlined by Schramm. As reported by Kaplun (1973), these were then the average figures for Latin America, for each 100 inhabitants 7.5 newspaper copies; 15.3 radio receivers; 5.7 television sets; and 2.7 cinema seats. In respect to newspapers, the Latin America average was below the 10-copy minimum set by Unesco, and relative to cinema the Latin American figure slightly surpassed the minimum of 2 seats. In the case of radio and television, instead, the Latin American figures were markedly above the Unesco minimum, which was 5 and 2 receiving units, respectively. Also those Latin American averages for the electronic media were considerably superior to the world averages, which were 11.3 radio receivers and 3.7 television sets.

How much below well-developed regions is, however, Latin America? Comparisons with the Federal Republic of Germany illustrate well the extent of the disparities. As reported by Kaplun (1973), while this country had for each one thousand of its inhabitants 446 radio receivers and 305 television sets, Latin America had only 153 and 57, respectively. And, if comparisons are made with figures for the United States of America, the distances become abismal, specially in respect to radio as there are in said country more receivers for this medium than inhabitants.

With close to 300 million inhabitants, Latin America had at the outset of the 1960's about 7% of the world's population. It had only 5% of the world's dailies and 6% of the cinema seats whereas it comprised more than 10% of the world's radio receivers and 12% of the television sets. Also the region already had then about 2.700 radio stations, amounting to a 23% of the world's total while this meant only 9% of the world's kilowatt power. There was, on the regional average, one radio station for each 16.000 receivers; in the case of Ecuador, there was one station for every 960 receivers (Kaplun, 1973). The Dominican Republic, with about 3 million inhabitants, had 76 AM and 9 FM transmitters, while Mexico had 400 transmitters to reach 3.5 million sets (Unesco, 1970). Caracas, a city populated by some 3 million people, had 18 radio stations. Colombia, a country with 25 million people, has close to 400 radio stations.

The Irrational Development of Broadcast Media

By the middle of the present decade such trends had become accentuated to a point of "spectacular growth" of radio and, even more so, television facilities.

The number of radio stations was estimated to surpass the 4.000 figure while it was indicated that perhaps as much as an 80% of them operated with transmitting plants below the 5 kw power. In a single city, Caracas, the number of stations grew from 78 to 128 between 1962 and 1972. (Pasquali, 1975).

The number of radio receivers per 100 inhabitants had slightly passed the 200 figure in 1975 on a regional average (Salinas, 1978).

There are certainly variations from country to country in both media. In television, for instance, Cuba -- followed by Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico and Panama -- is the only country with total audience coverage whereas countries as Haiti and Paraguay still have only very moderate coverage (Pasquali, 1975).

There are 300 television stations and the number of TV sets per 1.000 population grew from 4 in 7 countries in 1953 to 68 in 21 countries in 1975 (Salinas, 1978).

For all its impresiveness, however, not even such exceptionally accelerated expansion of electronic media can yet attain in Latin America full coverage of the entire population. Inspite of the "transistor revolution" and contrary to the visions of the "world as a global village", not even radio -- the most penetrating medium -- reaches more than half the region's population, according to researcher Mario Kaplun (1973).

Another Privilege of the Few

Why is that so? Illiteracy no doubt restricts the outreach of the print media and lack of electricity affects radio and television. So do lack of roads and the dispersion of population over large and often not easily accesible territories. But, as several studies have documented in the present decade, the central explanation is given by acute economic inequalities and socio-cultural disparities. To begin with, most mass media are located in the cities and address themselves essentially to the urban population to the exclusion of the rural dwellers, which still constitute about one half of the total population. And then, both within the cities and within the rural areas, mass media messages are actually accesible mostly to elites. As was verified by U.S. researchers, some Latin American "sub-elites" not only have mass media message consumption standards equivalent to those of counterpart people in the U.S. but even higher in the case of media as books. (Deutschmann, McNelly and Ellingsworth, 1961). Message distribution follows closely the patterns of marked social stratification which characterize Latin America: the higher the income, the social position and the education level, the higher the access to mass media messages and opportunities for using them.

Concludes Mario Kaplun (1973, p. 20): "We have in Latin America barely a 25 or 30% of the population half ways served by the means of social communication and a 70 to 75% partially or totally marginated from them."

It is not only that most people, specially the peasants, cannot afford to pay for the cost of daily mass media messages. There is also the fact that, even when some of them can afford them, the contents of such messages are hardly comprehensible or of interest and usefulness for other than the top of the upper class (Gutierrez and McNamara, 1968).

Mass Media Contents: Noxious

Indiference towards development tasks, lack of commitment to mass education, preference for the trivial, bizarre and sensational, emphasis on material well being, and the fostering of social conformity favoring the status quo have been stressed among the characteristic features of mass media content in Latin America.

Radio programming is typically constituted by some 40% of advertising, 30% of light popular music and 30% of information and sports (Kaplun, 1973). While some stations emphasize sports other stations concentrate on soap operas. One of these latter, a Venezuelan main station, was found

to broadcast 22 soap opera episodes per day covering almost 7 hours; out of its total daily transmission period of 16 hours, 5 were assigned to advertising; commercial spots interrupted program presentation more than 470 times a day. Also on a daily average, the 18 Caracas radio stations aired 8.500 commercial messages, as reported by Pasquali (1975). Thus, according to this researcher:

> The audience is reduced to the role of buyer, stimulated by a gigantic banalization process from which no one seems able to scape ... The soap opera is the last successful invention of Latin American broadcasting to conceal reality, and it is reaching almost histerical proportions in the whole continent, whereas any of the arguments that could affect the advertisers' interests -- even when they are of the highest social concern -- are unnamable taboos (Pasquali, 1975a, p. 16)

The influence of electronic media messages on their audiences cannot be ignored in Latin America, as several studies have clearly indicated. In Venezuela itself a survey with 1.000 housewives found that close to 90% of them listened to radio and watched television, showing in both cases very high levels of daily consumption of soap operas. Almost 75% of the sample believed soap operas were taken from real life and slightly over 50% said they took good lessons from soap operas to solve their own real problems. And the lower the social class the stronger these effects were (Colomina de Rivera, 1968).

A study of one week's television content in 51 channels of 15 Latin American countries -- cited by Kaplun (1973) -- found the following average program composition: entertainment, 76.2%; education and culture, 17.5%; and information, 6.3%. It also found that, on the average, 15 out of every 60 minutes of TV transmission were devoted to advertising.

Another study found the Venezuelan televiewer exposed to about 1.300 commercials per day, one every 79 seconds of program time -- a frequency of advertising about 60% higher than the standard in U.S. television (Pasquali, 1975 and 1975a)

As to the nature of TV content in Latin America, some studies have provided reasons for concern. In addition to finding evidence of induction of aggressive behaviors, one study found that TV materials -- soap operas, adventure series and commercials -- accounted for the formation of noxious stereotyped beliefs among children. Namely: (1) the "good guys" are from the U.S.; the bad are from other countries, specially Germany; (2) the

good guys are white, single and rich and tend to work as detectives, policemen and military; (3) the bad guys are black and poor and tend to work as clerks and laborers; (4) good or bad, most protagonists have English names but, when Spanish names are used, they pertain to the bad guys. This study found, moreover, indications that TV programming taken together amounted to the systematic promotion of an overall style of life, a set of values playing up the confort, money and luxury characteristic of consumer society (Santoro, 1975).

Other studies found similar indications. For instance, Tapia (1973) found that, behind their innocuous appearance, some cartoon TV series as "The Flintstones" sistematically propose the absorption of the capitalist ideology, suggesting the audience to conform with the existing order as natural and inevitable. A review (Beltran, 1978) identified two categories of possible TV effects: exciting-energizing and narcotic-analgesic. The former is seen as embracing mainly these values: individualism, elitism, racism, materialism, aggressiveness, adventurism and authoritarianism. The latter includes conservatism, conformism, self-defeatism, providencialism and romanticism.

The MacBride Commission recently deplored that "... radio messages still do not reach large portions of mankind in isolated areas and many of these messages when they reach mass audiences convey alien content and false images" (Unesco, 1978a, p. 34). A Caribbean observer agrees: "We find that in many Third World countries, particularily in the Caribbean and Latin America, the electronic mass media, specially television, play a role which is destructive of national cultural identity and of autonomous and independent economic and social development" (Demas, 1975, p. 4).

Questionable media contents are less evident in the print media but have also been identified by research in Latin America. Analysis of a sample of the region's main daily newspapers, compared with one of main dailies in North America and Europe, revealed content trends favoring trivia, consumerism and conservatism in the Latin American newspapers (CIESPAL, 1967). International news coverage for another sample of dailies for a single day did not acknowledge a political crisis in the Dominican Republic or a military revolt in Ecuador but included mention of a bizarre divorce and an unusual inheritance case in Peru (Diaz Rangel, 1967). No coverage was given to a "Tri Continental Conference on Asian, African and Latin American Revolutionary Solidarity" organized by Cuba although, rated as a grave threat, it had prompted an emergency meeting of the Organization of American States (Bethel, 1966; Kipp, 1967). Misbehavior of U.S. invasion troops against civilians in a Dominican Republic crisis and protests by intellectuals in may countries against such intervention

went unreported (Diaz Rangel, 1967). The November 1975 birth of a new republic in the region, Surinam, was either ignored or minimally reported by the main Latin American dailies (Reyes Matta, 1976). Information relative to the Andean countries (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia), which have an organization addressed at fostering their economic integration, was found to represent as little as 0.34% of the space alloted by Venezuela's three main dailies to international news. Moreover, most news published were on negative or picturesque events (Gomez, 1978).

The above are examples of how international news are often handled in this part of the world. Distortion, omission, preference for the trivial but unusual, and downplaying of events related to efforts to change the structure of society are frequent features of reporting both within nations and between them.

Magazines appear to be no exception to the trends so far enumerated. And this does no refer only to news magazines but to many kinds of popular and specialized magazines. For instance, "fotonovelas" -- magazines telling love stories through picture series accompanied by dialogue in balloon captions -- were found by Flora and Flora (1978) "... ideally suited to mold women to fit into a dependent capitalist structure ..." as they "stress pasivity, mobility-adaption, and individualism in support of status quo." Likewise, an analysis of the Spanish editions of the Reader's Digest lead to concluding that it fosters the notion that science is neutral and that knowledge acquired through it is in principle free but tends to favor those who are "good and ethical", and it suggests that the underdeveloped world is so due to fatality, bad climate, strange customs and a lack of tradition of great thinkers (Dorfman, 1977). Even cartoon strips and comic books are being identified as channels for alienation and for the promotion of materialistic aspirations, as in the case of the study of "Donald Duck" by Dorfman and Mattelart (1975).

Private Ownership and Mercantile Orientation

Who owns the mass media in Latin America?

As a rule, private enterprise -- essentially profit-making oriented, conservative and often related to national or transnational financial and political interests -- is the owner of the major media institutions. Multiple media ownership is not a rare phenomenon as individuals or firms who own many radio stations also own television channels and sometimes newspapers or magazines. State ownership virtually does not exist in respect to daily newspapers.

A precursor study conducted at the outset of present decade by a German scholar in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Argentina and Chile gave clear indications of oligopolic formation and suggested that media ownership concentration was specially acute in the case of television. Peter Schenkel (1973, p. 99) summarized his findings as follows:

> The obvious conclusions about this situation is that in the five countries analized a cast of wealthy families numerically very small exerts a very strong control over press, radio and television. This control provides it with extraordinary power to manipulate public opinion and influence the mentality and attitude of millions of consumers in their respectives countries, in accordance with their interests and with those of the classes to which the former belong and which they represent.

Electronic media show some participation of the State and of non-commercial private organizations in ownership, but this is so small that can hardly alter the dominant overall pattern. In at least an 80% of the total radio and television ownership are private and commercial. If Cuba is not considered, 93% of radio stations and 92% of television stations are privately owned and commercially oriented (Kaplun, 1973). For instance, Mexico has more than 400 radio stations but only a dozen of them are public and while Colombia has close to the same number of stations only one belongs to the State; of Venezuela's 128 stations, one -- and not the strongest -- is public. Such overwhelming predominance of private media ownership is a most uncommon, if not the only, case in the world, according to several observers. One of them, Venezuela's Antonio Pasquali (1975, p. 67) evaluates the consequences of said situation as follows:

> Latin America is the supreme living illustration of the fact that the system of handing over broadcasting to private enterprise is, without any doubt, the one that produces the worst results in cultural and social terms ... it has become the overt instrument of compulsive, common place transculturation; it produces hackeneyed programmes of poor quality because it has small economic resources; it disregards the real issues of public interest ...

Advertising: The Key Explanation

Mass media content is under the decisive influence of advertising in Latin America. Broadcasting operation based on paying a listener or viewer licence does not exist at all in this part of the world. Most of the revenue of the electronic media comes from commercial advertising. This is true in more than 90% of the cases for either of these media. Thus, reasons Kaplun (1973, p. 76), if out of each 3 minutes of listening to radio 1 minute is made of advertising and if out of each 4 minutes of television viewing, 1 minute is made of commercials, then in analyzing the content of these media the values explicitly and implicitly transmitted by advertisements must also be considered. Another analyst indicates that an estimated 10 million dollars are invested daily in advertising in Latin America, of which 60% are channeled through radio and television (Pasquali, 1975a). And a third observer adds that since advertising is the main source of operations it forms the bulk of programming: from 30 to 40% of radio programs and from 20 to 30% of television shows. Furthermore, there is a tendency to increasing the time of TV transmission to fourteen or more daily hours, so as to augment the time available for commercials (Salinas, 1978). The influence of advertisers on programming was perceived in a UNDP feasibility study for a regional tele-education network as follows:

> The program planner is consequently subject to the pressures of the advertiser and not to the demands of the community, which is seen as a "consumer mass". He is also subject to the "program schedule" which aims at immediate results at low costs and, lastly, to the laws of trade competition which obligue him to select his programmes with the basic goal of beating the audience ratings of competing programmes (UNDP, 1975, pp. 35-36).

THE EXTERNAL MATRIX

Is the nature of Latin America's mass media system explained essentially by intrinsic reasons or is it rather fundamentally determined by alien influences? Is the system independent from its national and international socio-economic context? Who pays for advertising in Latin America, who is in charge of it and how much does it influence media content? Are there other influences on media messages?

Latin America's mass communication system neatly corresponds to the nature of the social structure containing it: a primitive capitalist society characterized by internal domination and external dependence. Given a determinant set of unfair economic relationships by which, internally, minorities monopolize resources and influence and exploit majorities, then a concomitant pattern of cultural relationships by which such ruling elites impose their values and goals to the masses, with the instrumental assistance of communication. Externally, given that the economy of Latin America is subdued to the overwhelming interests of the United States of America to a point resembling colonial conditions, then a pattern of international communication geared to support economic, political and cultural imperialism.

Consequently, many of the features of the mass communication system of Latin America are rooted in the United States of America: organizational patterns, the concept of news; content orientation; financing; equipment; and even the nature of training and research. Media growth itself shows the influence, as Salinas (1978, p. 13) pointed out:

> Nothing could be more clear than the case of Latin American broadcasting. The creation of the Central American TV Network, for instance, is clearly related to the creation of the Central American Free Trade Area: in 1960, the International Division of the ABC-Paramount advanced funds to be invested in each of the five countries which were then forming the free trade area (Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica). The agreement concerning the formation of this economic community provided for U.S. business to be established in one Central American country and to sell its goods in all the countries of the area, without paying any tariffs. Naturally, such agreement constituted a powerful stimulus to the growth of commercial television. At that time, ABC's Worldvision Network reported to own 51 per cent of the new network.

Such realities are also acknowledged by U.S. researchers as Wells (1972, p. 194): "The dominance of North American over other influences on the developing countries is most apparent in the case of television, particularly in Latin America, the internationally recognized sphere of influence of the United States."

The Roots of Content: U.S. Advertising

Direct investment of this type is, however, no longer a characteristic of said U.S. influence; open media ownership proved inconvenient and less productive than other devices. Less notorious and more efficacious is advertising. Thus U.S. dominance in this area is today virtually absolute in the region. In the very Central American countries listed before, one U.S. firm, the McCann Erickson, holds a virtual monopoly of advertising business. But this is not an exceptional case. Either directly, through subsidiaries or through affiliates, U.S. advertising agencies are among the top ones in practically every country of the region, absorbing the higher percentages of the yearly billings. Out of Mexico' 500 million dollars annual advertising expenditures, 400 million is handled by eleven U.S. advertising firms, and only 4 of the country's 170 advertising firms are solely Mexican (By The Way, 1976).

Consequently, media -- specially radio and television -- area extremely dependent upon such agencies, which play a determinant role in programming orientation and content selection. "Obviously" -- points out Armand Mattelart (1976, p. 167) -- "the advertising investments - and the pressure which they exert on the mass media - originate mainly from North American enterprises." Namely, transnationals such as Westinghouse, General Motors, Good Year, Cyanamid, Coca-Cola, Chrysler, Procter and Gamble, Lever Brothers, Abbott Laboratories, General Electric, Ford, etc. A U.S. researcher has this to say about it:

> The ability of multinational corporations to utilize modern communication systems and technology for the dissemination of the advertising messages and general programs that are produced for their marketing needs with their financial support, contributes to the world-wide acceptance and growth of consumerism and commodity worship. It further draws the peoples and the countries touched by these images and messages into the modern world capitalist system and reinforces prevailing inequalities in power, income and communication (Schiller, 1976, p. 180).

Advertisers know that in most Third World countries mass poverty is such that opportunities for market expansion are quite limited. Nevertheless they insist through mass media to exacerbate the people's irrational will to buy goods and enjoy services even if some of these are superfluos and expensive. As Riding (1978) once noted in Mexico: "In slums buying habits have been distorted so that the poor may buy soft drinks instead of milk." Often unable to get more people to become significant buyers, the advertising agencies concentrate then on seeking to turn those who can buy things into

obsessive, virtually compulsive buyers. All the gimmickry of symbol manipulation for psycosocial control of behavior is exerted through an arsinal of media devices. As the market becomes more active, the media increase their dynamics too. And viceversa.

Canned Alienation at Bargain Prices

From one to two thirds of television programs shown in Latin America come from the U.S. Even countries having an exceptional capability to engage in local production recourse to translated canned materials which are sold to them at very low prices. Such is the case of Venezuela and Brazil, where 80% of TV materials come from abroad, with at least one half of it originating in the United States (Pasquali, 1975, Marques de Melo, 1979). There where the dominance of English among the audience is a facilitator -- the case of many Caribbean countries -- then the proportions of U.S. materials alone tend to reach the level of three quarters of the total. A U.S. researcher offers this testimony: "I could view a television quiz show which not only copied an American format but even used questions about the United States rather than about Barbados. The reward for winning a quiz: a trip to the United States." (Lent, 1979, p. 59). Over one third of all U.S. TV program exports were purchased by Latin American stations, mainly Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela and Peru, according to Varis (1973), spending yearly some 80 million dollars for it, as reported by Mas (1969). Thus no wonder, as reported by Kaplun (1973), Bonanza and Mission Impossible, a spy serial glorifying CIA agents who destroy plots of Castro-type subversives, had the highest audience ratings in Latin America at the outset of the present decade. In view of such situation, Katz and Wedell (1977, pp. 203-204) ask:

> Cannot Nigerian or Peruvian or Senegalese television be more indigenous, not just in programming, but in style? What is needed are more radical suggestions for making radio and television relevant for peoples who have more important problems than those that can be solved by Chief Ironside.

The statement points out a problem now increasingly being perceived: many locally made radio and television programs in the developing countries are hardly different from those imported from the U.S. They stick to the models established by this country's electronic media industry, engaging at most in adaptation. This means that the alien influence in this area is multiplied way above the figures of importation of canned materials and, hence, national production can be deemed no less alienating in spite of its "native" appearance. As has been underlined by attentive observers as Rita O'Brien (1974), Marques de Melo (1979) and Lent (1979), this phenomenon

has much to do with the technology of broadcasting production, which is also chiefly imported from the U.S. A clear illustration of it is given by the Brazilian case: in close to 78% of cases, a recent survey found, TV equipment was purchased from the U.S., whereas equivalent imports from West Germany amounted to about 15% (Marques de Melo, 1979). With technology transfer comes the training to use the foreign equipment and, through it, ideology deeply penetrates the mentality of national producers.

The Evils of the "Man Bites Dog" Doctrine

News handling is the other major area where U.S. influence gravely affects Latin America. In 1977 the Minister of Education of Colombia made this public testimony illustrative of the problem:

> Some days ago, in a television programme, I referred to a social problem concerning education. I said that sixty thousand children apply for admission to the secondary school in Bogota, but only half of them can be accepted, as the schools have no capacity to receive them all. I spent half an hour to explain the seriousness of the problem. I spent thirty seconds to comment on the neccesity for taking account of such realities when discussing, for instance, the adequacy of aiming at hosting a World Soccer Championship in our country. Not a single mass medium paid attention to the social problem I referred to, which is as urgent as dramatic for a great number of children, but the point concerning football became international news, causing sensation and provoking innumerable comments. The fact that half of the school population of the capital has no place where to study is a real, dramatic problem; yet it did not interest correspondents, it was not considered to be news. This is a consequence of the information values existing in our media, which reflect as well alien influences and values.*

Such influences are overwhelming. Between the United Press International and the Associated Press, the U.S. controls almost two thirds of all international news traffic in Latin America. "Wire information" "-- noted a Latin American newspaperman -- "depends on the United States as our economies depend upon it. AP and UPI have the decisive weight in opinion formation in the average Latin American country about the most important world events" (Diaz Rangel, 1967, pp. 43-33). And the same seems true of regional events. As the President of Venezuela, Carlos Andres Perez, reported, the Presidents of the Andean Republics had to keep in daily telephone contact during automotor industry negotiations so

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* As cited by Reyes Matta, 1978, p. 1.

as to cope with pressures and distortions operated through information about it from the transnational news agencies (Reyes Matta, 1978).

This U.S. hegemony operates in all directions: from the region to the world, viceversa and even within the region for, in fact, news originating in Mexico, Bolivia or Uruguay first go to New York before they come back, filtered, to the rest of the Latin American countries. And many studies have found that, indeed, as denounced by the Colombian Minister, the classical U.S. concept of news -- the "man bites dog" principle -- prevails not only among foreign correspondens but also among local "gatekeepers", doing much harm to Latin America. The image that the transnational news agencies sell abroad of Latin America is often partial, distorted and biased. Likewise, the image that Latin Americans get of the rest of the world is no less fragmentary slanted and inaccurate. Whitaker (1969), working with a sample of large circulation U.S. magazines, is one of the many researchers who have documented this situation.

The Final Touch: Subversive Communication

Indeed the U.S. dominates much of the Latin American mass communication activity, helping secure the political and economic control of it. It can be argued that other parts of the world suffer comparable domination from the U.S. For instance, Canada, according to the president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, is the victim of "a relentless American cultural penetration" mostly through TV (Johnson, 1977, 1977a). And even countries not neighboring the U.S. seem to be worried, as is illustrated by the following statement: "U.S. style television marketing is producing turmoil in the German industry... U.S. companies with massive research budgets and sophisticated psycological testing ... are going directly to the consumer via television ... (consequently a few years from now their (German) industry will look quite different -- perhaps a good deal more American (Business Week, 1978, p. 22A).

It is, however, Latin America, the subdued Southern neighbor, who gets colonialist treatment in all terms of the relationship, including communication. Indeed, in addition to rather overt and large-scale propaganda operations performed in the region by the United States Information Service, even secret security agencies of the United States recourse to

mass media manipulation in order to discourage social emancipation movements in the region. And at times such agencies use the media to help "destabilizie" legitimally elected but change-oriented popular governments. As verified and reported by U.S. Congressional Commissions, the Central Intelligence Agency engaged in strong undercover mass communication campaigns against Chile's Salvador Allende before he was elected and until he was deposed.* As recorded by Carvalho (1977), the U.S. House Select Committee on Intelligence commented as follows on this matter:

> The free flow of information, vital to a responsible and credible press, has been threatened as a result of the CIA's use of the world media for cover and clandestine information-gathering.

REMEDIAL PROSPECTS

It is indeed a very bad situation. But it is not hopeless. While some Latin Americans seek to perpetuate it, other struggle to change it. Overcoming it is likely to be an extremely difficult endeavour. However, public consciousness of the problem is spreading so fast among political leaders, academicians and media practitioners that it may prove not inconsequential. The present decade has, indeed, marked a period of great intensity and significant advancements in the struggle.

Alternative and Supplementary Media Systems

The forces for change have recoursed to several strategies aimed to at least alleviate the situation. A pioneer one, dating back in origin a quarter of a century, has been the region-wide movement of rural mass education through "radiophonic schools", a Colombian invention.** Much more recently other supplementary or alternative uses of media for popular communication are being experimented from Guatemala to Peru, including puppets and theatre, loudspeakers and community newspapers, cassette forum, and ever mobile television, as has been reported by O'Sullivan and Kaplun (1979) as well as by Diaz Bordenave (1977).

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* See U.S. Senate (1975, 1976).

** Analytical descriptions of them have been provided by, among others, McAnany (1973), Bernal Alarcón (1971) and Beltrán (1976). A comprehensive study was conducted by experts from the German Development Institute and reported by Musto (1971).

National Communication Policies

Another major strategy for change is that of fostering the establishment of overall national communication policies, which some regard crucially important to overcome underdevelopment. For instance, Egon Bahr (1975, p. 4) Minister of Economic Cooperation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1975, stated such conviction as follows:

> For the development of the Third World, media policy is a task lieing immediately after that of securing food and having, at least, the same importance as economic, monetary or demographic policy.

Latin Americans are precursors in this area of activity. On the basis of conceptual exploration document (Beltrán, 1973), Unesco convened in Bogota in 1974 a group of experts whose recommendations it asked for building an annotated agenda for an Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean, the first of its kind in the world. The report containing those recommendations (Unesco, 1974) was the object of strong attack by the Inter-American Association of Broadcasters (AIR) and the Inter-American Press Association (SIP), which group media owners and managers. About the same was true of a later meeting, held in Quito, to prepare propositions relative to international news exchange in the region (Unesco, 1975).

As reported by Beltrán (1977), Capriles (1977) and Salinas (1978), the SIP and the AIR launched subsequently a massive and often virulent propaganda campaign against the intended conference and its sponsor, Unesco. The central claim of the campaign was that fostering communication policies amounted to a sinister authoritarian conspiracy against freedom of information and private ownership of the mass media. Nevertheless, although delayed and slandered, the Conference took place in Costa Rica, the most democratic country of the region, in July of 1976. And the leader of it was another exemplary democratic government, that of Venezuela, whose President, Carlos Andrés Pérez, and whose Minister of Information, Guido Grooscors, showed an umkistakable commitment to the cause of democratizing the mass communication system of the region. In spite of all the misinformation and harrasment that preceded and sorrounded its deliberations (Grooscors, 1977, Capriles, 1977, Salinas, 1977), the Conference did produce a set of important resolutions, condemning the present state of affairs and proposing remedial actions both at national and international levels, as was recorded in the respective report (Unesco, 1976). Later, essentially under Venezuelan leadership again, a similar conference on cultural policies, held in Bogota also included comparable recommendations in its own final report (Unesco, 1978).

Other Alleviatory Strategies

Another promisory move has been the establishment of one regional and two sub-regional cooperative news agencies: Latin, the Caribbean News Agency-CANA, and the Central American News Agency-ACAN (Nichols, 1974; Unesco, s.d.; Fernandez, s.d.). And the blueprint for a regional agency of features and other special services, "ALASEI", is ready (Salinas, 1979).

Yet another element of the struggle is the formation of professional communicators' associations identified with the need for change. One of them is the new Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIC). Another is the Latin American Federation of Journalists (FELAP), born in Mexico in 1976; it groups about 30 national organizations comprising some 40.000 newspapermen.

Finally, it must be mentioned that significant conceptual advancements are also being made in the region, like a redefinition of news in terms of social responsibility rather than mercantile interest (Reyes Matta, 1979), and preliminary models of democratic, participatory or "horizontal" communication (Beltrán, 1979). Training and research philosophies and methodologies are also being subject to scrutiny.

These are perhaps small steps but may operate as key building blocks. And, above and beyond Latin America, they are also contributions to a Third World universal dream: a New International Information Order.* May it come true soon.

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* Some of the Latin American contributions to the debate about the NIIO are those of Reyes Matta (1978), Somavía (1976), González Manet (1979), Capriles (1979), Jaworski (1979), Beltrán and Cardona (1979a), and Mayobre (1977).

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